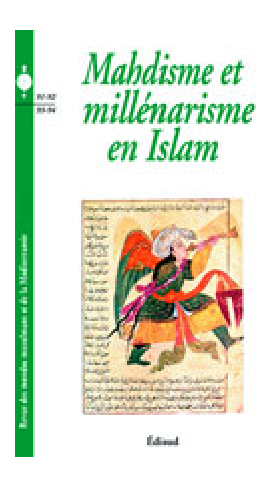
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Mahdism and millenarianism in Islam

Edited by **Mercedes Garcia-Arenal**
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The millennial and messianic tradition in Islam is known as Mahdism. The mahdî, "the well-guided", is a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad who, as a pre-appointed and infallible leader, "will arise" to initiate a great social transformation, in order to restore the purity of the first times by placing all things under divine guidance. The Islamic Messiah embodies the aspirations of his followers for the restoration of the purity of faith which will bring truthful and uncorrupted leadership to all mankind, creating a just social order and a world free from oppression for a time to come. the last hour. Mahdism has to do with the question of the legitimate leadership of the community, and therefore of political power; it is one of the most powerful remedies that offers Muslim tradition to legitimize a leader from a religious and political point of view, but also to legitimize a rebellion against the established power. Mahdism also has to do with the Islamic ideas of redemption and salvation. Mahdism holds a central place in Islamic history. This volume testifies to the

extent of the phenomenon in time and space (from sub-Saharan Africa to India in the first Islamic centuries and to Ataturk's Turkey), the richness and diversity of the millennial tradition in Islam. It is a question of articulating, at the different periods and for the various regions of the Muslim world, the study of doctrinal development with that of the social, political or economic history of these movements.

First part

Mahdism and millenarianism in Islam

Second part

Free studies, readings

I. Free study

II. Readings

Review of Muslim worlds and the Mediterranean

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Mahdism and millenarianism in Islam
Part one - Mahdism and millenarianism in Islam

Introduction

Mercedes García-Arenal

p. 7-16

Notice to the reader

The following document is a transcript from an OCR (optical character recognition), spelling errors may subsist. You can reach an original version of the text via the facsimile icon below.

Full text

1 To devote a volume to millennialism in Islam, this is a good opportunity offered to us by the turn of the millennium. Once accomplished, we see how it was a relevant business, even necessary. Millennialism has a central place in Islamic history. The extent of the phenomenon, in time and space, its recurrence from the beginning of Islam to the present day, the richness and diversity of the Islamic millennial tradition are striking, especially as we clearly sees that what we are showing here is only the tip of the iceberg.

2 An in-depth study of the Islamic doomsday movements is still wishful thinking, although such a study has to do with issues that have recently captured the attention of scholars. For the West, sociologists, anthropologists and historians have long established typologies of millennial movements and have described the political, economic and social causes of these movements. We now have an enormous bibliography, which ranges from the quest for the Millennium to the “sociology of hope”, as well as to “nativistic movements” and “cooked cargo” or “primitive rebels”. For Judaism, the correspondences between mysticism and messianism opened up new avenues of research. For Islam, there is still a long way to go.

3 In Islam, the millennial tradition has developed under the name of Mahdism. Although the terms "messiah" and "messianism" make a specific Judeo-Christian sound and encompass a whole series of non-Islamic doctrines, many scholars find it perfectly acceptable to use them in an Islamic context, if it is clearly specified in what way. meaning they are used: that is to say to formulate the important concept of an eschatological figure, the mahdi who, as predesignated chief, will "rise up" to initiate a great social transformation in order to restore purity from the first times by placing all things under divine direction. Thus the Islamic messiah embodies the aspirations of his followers towards the restoration of the purity of the faith,

4 Like "messiah," a variety of technical terms are used in this volume, and we must first try to clarify the concepts behind them. Not for fear that the reader will know them, but because they can point to an implicit mental model, or even disguise our ignorance, or incomplete knowledge, in a known language. Thus the term "eschatological" will be used to mean the belief in the end of history produced by God, a conclusion in which good will have its reward and evil will be punished. Apocalyptic beliefs hold that this Eschaton is imminent, that it will occur in a period of time that ranges from one generation to a year. "Chiliasm" is the term used to signify the belief that the End will bring, before materializing, a period of peace, harmony and justice. The term "millenarianism", equivalent to "chiliasm", characterizes religious movements which await in this world an imminent, total, collective salvation. It is applied to a wide range of movements, and the salvation expected then involves total upheaval, often painful and full of suffering. Most millenarian movements are messianic: that is, salvation is brought by a redeemer who acts as a mediator between the human and the divine. The total and intense commitment demanded by millennialism is required by leaders who are seen as extraordinary men, endowed with supernatural powers. We must therefore use the same term (messianic) to designate the general belief in a messianic role of someone specific, as well as for an individual's belief in his own messianic mission. They do not always cover the same reality. It is also difficult to precisely define the concepts of messianism and mysticism. Mystical experiences derive from an intimate connection, sometimes described as direct contact with God. This contact can push the mystic to take political action on his community.

5 Messianism must not only be studied as part of a body of religious concepts in order to integrate it into a theology or the history of religious ideas but also from a political and social point of view, considering the movement and the action that takes place in the community, onto which these ideas are projected. In other words, the apocalyptic inspiration must be analyzed as a factor distinct from political, economic and social factors, even if they operate simultaneously. The reaction to social, political, economic situations could not be of apocalyptic inspiration but take other forms, also known and frequent, such as emigration, opportunism, banditry or even quietism and resignation. In fact, this apocalyptic inspiration often coincides with the expression of ideas (theological, mystical ...) elaborated in circles belonging to the highest culture rather than in the poor groups who would make the body with these movements. The model is therefore neither that of a simple top-to-bottom diffusion nor of course one where ideas arise only among the dominant classes. Millenarian movements, as we will see, express much more complex relationships. We try, in this volume, to combine the study of doctrinal development with that of the social, political or economic history of these movements. And one of the concerns that underlies many contributions is the distinction that the one has to make between the expectations and popular beliefs of the followers of the movement, and the person and the doctrinal development of the "messiah" himself. We try to perceive which parts or which aspects of an individual thought manage to acquire, and in which way, a public legitimacy while being transformed during the process.

6 We initially thought of limiting this volume to Mediterranean Muslim countries and therefore mainly Sunnis. But it is not possible to reach a historical understanding of Mahdism in the Muslim world without taking into account its Shiite component as well as

the messianic movements that occurred in so-called peripheral Islamic regions, particularly in India, Pakistan, Africa south of the Sahara and Sudan.

7 From a sociological point of view, we see in this volume that the movements studied occur in a social context of confusing transformations. In general, we can observe that the essential triggering factor is not so much a severe ordeal undergone but rather a clear gap between the aspirations of social actors and the means of their satisfaction. In other cases, the inability to meet traditional expectations will predominate: during periods of profound social transformations, the mythical image of a different and better past emerges, a model of perfection, in the face of which the present appears to be a decadence, a degeneration. The struggle to transform the social order then becomes mythical. In medieval Europe, millennialism attracted mainly people who found themselves cut off from the traditional order and were unable to fulfill the aspirations it aroused in them. We find the same kind of frustration in the confrontation, in pre-colonial and colonial times, with modern European societies, and with Westernization. This is the case of Algeria of the XIXe century (Clancy-Smith) of British India (Gaborieau, MacLean) and Kemalist Turkey (Borzaslan).

8 Millennialism was often born out of the search for a coherent system of values, a new cultural identity and a regained sense of dignity and self-respect as well as the social isolation that results from the breakdown of ties. traditional group. Analysis of the sources of medieval Europe shows that millennialism was not very attractive to people who were firmly rooted in well integrated groups, efficiently organized and protected in cohesive and united local communities. This can be applied to the medieval Islamic Muslim world and we can therefore observe that the conversion to Islam at the time of the Muslim Conquest, involved enormous social transformations, which constituted a revulsive which often resulted in messianic movements. It is therefore no coincidence that the contributions in this volume take place in the early days of Islam, during the Muslim conquest and implantation, in the period of Iberian interference in the Maghreb, or during the pre-colonial presence. or European colonial, or even during the westernizing reforms of Atatürk. Often these movements also arise in the geographic peripheries of areas beyond the direct control of central authorities; their social composition sometimes includes confederations of tribal alliances organized according to new rules; the role of brotherhoods (or during the pre-colonial or colonial European presence, or even during Atatürk's westernizing reforms. Often these movements also arise in the geographic peripheries of areas beyond the direct control of central authorities; their social composition sometimes includes confederations of tribal alliances organized according to new rules; the role of brotherhoods (or during the pre-colonial or colonial European presence, or even during Atatürk's westernizing reforms. Often these movements also arise in the geographic peripheries of areas beyond the direct control of central authorities; their social composition sometimes includes confederations of tribal alliances organized according to new rules; the role of brotherhoods (*turûq) is* crucial. Millennialism provides an important lever for the recruitment of new leaders. It opens up new prospects for promotion and develops a range of new statuses outside of the order and traditional legitimation. At the same time, we also observe relationships between charisma and lineage, which grants the Mahdi a "traditional" authority.

9 Most of the epiphenomena of the Islamic apocalypse are well known. According to strict tradition, at the end of time (*âkhir al-zamâri*) the beasts of the Apocalypse will descend, the sun will rise in the West and the Antichrist, al-Dajjâl, will spread chaos on the earth. After a prolonged struggle, the Antichrist will be defeated by the Mahdi, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and bearer of his name, Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah. The Mahdi will establish the kingdom of righteousness and reign until the Last Judgment. There are two important variations in Sunni Islam. First, instead of the mahdi appearing once and for all at the end of time, history will produce at various critical times "Masters of the Hour" who will save the community from some temporary peril. And secondly, these Masters of the Hour will have delegates (*khalîfa-s*) that will pave the way for their

message. This leaves room for ideas of cyclical reform which link Mahdism to the tradition around mujaddid (renovator) and the notion of *tajdîd al-dîn* (renovation of religion) and therefore to reformist and “revivalist” movements. There may be a return to the golden age in the middle of Time, a "middle mahdi" which is formally analogous to the conception of *mujaddid* (Gaborieau, Fillitz).

10 Among the Shiites, the hope of a restorer of justice and religion has been very intense. Unlike Sunnism, the belief in the coming of the Mahdi has become an article of faith and is an essential part of the Shiite faith. The Shiite mahdi is *ma'sûm* (protected from error and sin), a quality which is, in Sunnism, strictly reserved for the prophets. The distinctive character of Twelver Shiism is the belief in the temporary absence or occultation (*ghaybd*) of the mahdi and therefore in a second advent (*raja ma'âd).*Amir-Moezzi (1992), showed how the Shiism of the first three centuries of Islam is based on esotericism and the occult sciences: the main characteristic of this first doctrine is the cosmological status of the imam, a pre-existing entity , a light which, with the light of Muhammad, emerges directly from the divine light before the creation of the universe (Amir-Moezzi, Lory). The inaccessible mystery of the divine light which manifests itself in its Prophet (*nûr muhammadî*) is one of the recurring subjects in mystical prophetology, Sunni as well as Shiite (Rubin, 1975).

11 Traditionally scholars have held that the idea of final redemption was alien to Muhammad and his early followers. It was developed postérieusement the Prophet, during the civil wars (in the Jewish and Christian influences) and religious controversies accompanying the growth of the Umayyad dynasty in the second half of the VII th century. The subsequent development of the caliphate and the decline of Islamic piety and power brought about the emergence of a myth of the Golden Age of Islam and a strong yearning for its recovery. A belief developed that when injustice reached its height, the Mahdi would come and restore the old glory and open a reign of plenty and righteousness.

12 Paul Casanova (1911) argued a very suggestive but questionable theory. It was based on the assumption that the belief in the imminence of the coming of the Hour was the strongest motivation, if not even the raison d'être of the mission of Muhammad which, at the beginning, would not have not aimed at the establishment of a political and social system but rather warned his contemporaries that the end was near. Thus, argued Casanova, Muslim eschatology should be considered the oldest discourse in Tradition. However, as the Hour was not coming and life had to go on, the Muslim community, cautiously but gradually, organized its affairs. With a very different approach, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook (1977) came to conclude that the Islam had been messianic in its beginnings, but that, little by little, the role of Messiah was transferred from the character of the founder, and that of his successor 'Umar al-Fârûq, to that of Jesus and, finally, to that of the Mahdi whose goal was to achieve on earth an abstract justice, without particular historical color. Crone even proposes (1987) the hypothesis according to which the advent of Islam would have corresponded to a nativist movement. In this volume, E. Donner, D. Cook and M. Brett discuss this questionable theory, accepting it or not. Donner, who does not accept it, presents objections and a different interpretation of the materials used for this "messianic theory", he sees instead attempts to divert the attention of later Muslims, as well as that of Jews and Christians, of the early proximity between early Muslim believers and Jews and Christians, the "sectarian milieu" of Wansbrough. Brett finds that this evolutionary pattern and the contradictions he identifies in the Islamic version of messianism are all noticeable in his reading of the sources surrounding the character of the Fatimid Mahdi.

13 Coming back to Casanova, he pushed his theory even further. According to him, the Mahdi is none other than Muhammad surviving himself in another form, and completing his messianic work. Mahdism is the very essence of Islam. The doctrine of Mahdism thus appears closely linked to that of the Imamate: for Casanova, even in Sunni Islam, the Mahdi is the rigorous equivalent of the Imam and, in principle, every Imam is a Mahdi. In

this volume, continuing the history of Mahdism, we find other more explicit clues to this identity.

14 Without necessarily subscribing to Casanova's theory in all its implications, but by sharing it in part or drawing inspiration from it, some Islamists have recently undertaken to read history from Islamic apocalyptic documents. Y. Friedman (1986) studied traditions which transfer the concept of the seal of the prophets *(khatm al-nubuwa)*in the eschatological realm. The Prophet is the last, not because prophecy ceases after his death, but because the Last Day is imminent and all things here below have an end. According to Friedman, this is one of the many ways in which the Islamic tradition reflects Muhammad's deep sense of the coming of the Last Day. Islamic millenarianism thus remains linked to the problem of the continuation of prophecy and therefore to Sufi mysticism and the concept of *khatm al-awliyâ* and especially to the means of overcoming the fear of a future deprived of divine guidance.

15 D. Cook shows that astronomical events were decisive in the apocalyptic beliefs of the first centuries of Islam. P. Lory establishes the system of correspondences between natural phenomena and linguistic mechanisms of Jâbir's alchemy. Nothing escapes this globalizing reading of the human environment, not even its finality and its historical achievement. Occult sciences and alchemy, "sister of prophecy", are a powerful factor in the salvation of this world. The alchemists feel invested with a decisive initiatory mission of a Gnostic order. Also doctrinal Imamite Shiism can only be understood, as Amir-Moezzi shows, as an esoteric initiatory teaching opening up to mythical discourse. Amir-Moezzi starts from the intimate coherence that links the two capital notions of the End of Time and the Return to Origin in ancient texts. The reports are fundamental for a better understanding of Imamite eschatology and messianism on the one hand and of the central role played by the figure of the imam. For the Nizarite Ismailis, the imam is always physically present in the world: it is also among them that the idea appeared that the imam was a character with superhuman qualities and that he was the depositary of divine light.*(nûr)* (Boivin). *Mahdî, ghayba, ra'ja, nûr,* these notions become the basis of the Shiite creed.

16 The phenomenon of Mahdism has not only to do with the question of the imamate and that of the legitimate leadership of the community, but also with the Islamic ideas of redemption and salvation. If the Islamic doctrine of salvation was conceived as the formation of an ideal politico-religious community living within the legal and social framework of Islam, then such an ideal became dependent on the leader who could ensure its realization. Soon after the Prophet's death, therefore, the question of community leadership became the crucial issue. The doctrine of salvation became entangled with the theory of the relationship to God through the mediation of the Prophet, charged with delivering the Message.

17 Thus the question of the Mahdi, the well guided, is linked in Shiism, but also in Sunnism, to questions of the legitimacy of political power and of community leadership. And, insofar as the Koran had not envisaged the appearance of the Mahdi-Redeemer to guide the community of believers, it was the devotion of the faithful to the Prophet that made them wait for the coming of a savior from his family and guided by the hand of God. This is why Mahdism is understood by several contributors to this volume (especially by Touati) in the context of the development of the cult of the Prophet. The social and religious prestige, in certain periods and for some areas of Mediterranean Islam, of the descendants of the Prophet, the *shurafâ ',*although being an independent phenomenon in itself, provided fertile ground for Mahdism (Touati, Garcia-Arenal). In the Maghreb, the cult of the Prophet and the rise of Sharifism are also deeply linked to Sufism.

18 The question of power and its legitimate foundations runs throughout this volume. The millennial movements are essentially activists and militants, committed to establishing a perfect Islamic state on earth through the *jihad*. Mahdism is one of the remedies offered by the Muslim tradition to legitimize a ruler religiously and politically, as well as to legitimize rebellion against established power. It is a particularly effective remedy when

the objective is to renovate the elites of society (Fierro). A doctrine of purification is used to eliminate what exists, and the new takes hold as a newfound tradition.

19 If the objective is often to renovate the elites, this does not imply that they are always movements emanating from the peasantry. We will see movements of protest or rivalry directed against religious and political classes, established by members and groups of these same classes. We may be surprised to see how many of these movements are happening against state scholars. (Fierro, MacLean, Fillitz, Clancy-Smith ...) by other groups who challenge his power and his interpretation of the Law.

20 The primary importance of prophetic leadership in the Islamic worldview is well known. Because of the great prestige of Prophecy, tradition praises certain religious accomplishments and certain types of behavior by saying that they resemble those of the prophets. Likewise, it was recognized that some of the prophetic tasks could be taken on by persons whose religious knowledge and accomplished spirituality qualified them to lead the community. In the Sunni tradition we often find the idea that the ulemas are the heirs of the prophecy: *al-'ulamâ'warathat al-anbiyâ '*. Some Sufis maintained that they had achieved prophetic perfection by following the Prophet's example as faithfully as possible. If the capacity of*mu'jizât*) is exclusive of the prophets, one of the signs of the stages traveled by the *awliyâ ',* is their ability to perform miracles *(karâmât)*. The quality of the infallibility *(isma)* of Muhammad is very important in Islamic prophetology, because the absolute obedience which is due to the Prophet only makes sense as long as he is an immaculate model. The notion of *'isma* is very close to the “imitatio Muhammadi”, which has a long tradition but whose extraordinary development is due to Sufism. So *isma* is, according to the Shiites, an intrinsic quality of the imam. If, in Shiite theology, the concept of *nûr is* essential,th century) formulated their vision in terms of *nûr muhammadî*. Shiism and Sufism thus come together in a fertile ground for the emergence of the mahdi. The role of the Sufi shaykh, guiding, directing the disciples, often leads to the archetype of political action with a millennial tinge. Of *zdwiya-s* support a high degree of anticipation métatistique and are often the cause of millenarian movements whose objective is the exercise of political power. And we return to questions already asked. Did the few Mahdis considered here want to give a millennial image, *'isma*included? How far does the need and invention of misguided disciples go, as well as the opponents in power who write the chronicles? (Nagel, Gaborieau). We are struck by how much the texts of the Mahdist corpus, a completely unusual repertoire, are known and internalized by the crowds, even in its codified rituals (Borzaslan), even by crowds who have never had any experience. direct from a Mahdist movement. In the Maghreb in particular, the expectation of the Mahdi, nourished by traditions and legends, is anchored in the collective memory of the populations and constitutes one of its most formidable political and religious topoi. The text of Ibn Khaldûn concerning the belief in the mahdi proves it (Brett, Touati). Moreover, a messianic cycle does does not necessarily end with the disappearance of the messiah, the later actors constantly putting him "on the scene". See the example of Ibn Tûmart (Brett, Fierro, Nagel, Garcia-Arenal).

21 Mahdism is a bridge between the past and the present as well as between religion and politics. It implies a charismatic authority, ready to break the norms in force but, generally, in the name of Tradition, reviving a mythical lost past; a charismatic movement can bring about the radicalization of tradition and therefore its transformation. The Mahdi is infallible and he is the highest authority in the Law that he can make and undo. The reforming effort of the Mahdi therefore necessarily relates to jurisprudence; it is the source of authority and can even reach (or end) as far as antinomianism (Fierro, Nagel, Layish).

22 Messianic messages should be expressed in terms that are already familiar and understandable to disciples who support charismatic leaders. More so, the charism must be reinterpreted of known facts. Millennialism expresses its political message with the familiar and strong images and language of mainstream religion, using and revitalizing entrenched symbols. In such settings, mobilization for new political goals is often only

possible when they are translated into religious terms. We see repeated throughout the Muslim world the terms and symbols used by the Mahdis: *jihâd, hijra, al-amr bi-l-ma'rûf wa-l-nahyî 'an al-mun- kar* ...They all represent powerful symbols of the Islamic tradition used profusely by Mahdist propaganda and acquiring special meanings.

23 These are some conclusions and some questions that run through this volume. The reader will no doubt find many more. We would have liked the vision offered here to be even more complete. As it stands, this work is already laying the groundwork for collective reflection ... May it raise new questions, new research.

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About the author

Mercedes García-Arenal
Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, Madrid.

By this author

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Mahdism and millenarianism in Islam
Part one - Mahdism and millenarianism in Islam

Imam and Mahdi: Ibn Abî Mahallî [1]

Mercedes García-Arenal

p. 157-180

Abstracts

French English
Ibn Abî Mahallî (m. 1613) est le dernier mahdi maghrébin à avoir pris le pouvoir. Je fais usage dans cet article, de trois types de sources : les œuvres d'Ibn Abî Mahallî lui-même, les sources arabes contemporaines et postérieures, soutenant toujours le pouvoir dynastique régnant et, troisièmement, les documents d'archive européens écrits par des observateurs et des voyageurs contemporains. Cette variété de sources permet de tracer le spectre qui va depuis les attentes et les croyances populaires des adeptes, jusqu'à la personne et à l'élaboration doctrinale d'Ibn Abî Mahallî. J'ai donc tenté de percevoir quelles parties ou aspects d'une pensée individuelle arrivent à acquérir, et de quelle manière, une légitimité publique, en se transformant en même temps.

Ibn Abî Mahallî (d. 1643) was the last mahdi to have taken political power in Morocco. This article makes use of three types of sources: the works of Ibn Abî Mahallî himself, contemporary and later Arabic sources - which invariably support the ruling dynasty - and finally, documents from European archives written by contemporary merchants or agents. This variety of sources permits one to study the range of ideas concerning Ibn Abî Mahalli from the expectations and beliefs of the followers to the doctrinal construction developed by Ibn Abî Mahalli himself. They allow one to perceive which elements and which aspects of an individual's thought came to acquire public legitimacy and the manner in which this happened.

Notice to the reader

Full text

1 In 1610 a group of men in rags and badly armed, at the head of which was a character called Abû Mahallî or Ibn Abî Mahallî, conquered the city of Sijilmasa and expelled from it the governor and the Sa'adian army. He began to implement the reform of morals and the repression of the abuses he had been preaching for some time. From Sijilmasa, with a growing group of supporters who believed that he was the Mahdi, the expected Fatimi, Ibn Abî Mahallî conquered the Dra 'region, crossed the Atlas and besieged the Sa'adian capital, Marrakech, of which he ended up seize, thus becoming the last Maghrebian Mahdi to have seized power until this day. His brief period of government ended with his death in 1613 in a battle where he faced Sultan's supporters sa ' adien Mawlây Zaydân, who took over the city. The head of Ibn Abî Mahallî, suspended from the ramparts of the city, remained there until its disintegration. Long after his disappearance, the populations of the southern Atlas and the Sahara refused to believe in his death, and claimed that he was only "hidden", and that he had to return. What remained of his head was finally buried in the shrine of Abu l-Abbas al-Sabtî.

2 On Ibn Abî Mahallî, we have many sources, the most important undoubtedly being his own works, half a dozen manuscripts, none of which has been published to date [2] ; as well as major sources of the Alawite period, such as the *Muhâdarât* of al-Yûsî, the *Nuzha* of al-Ifrânî or *Nashr al-Mathânî* of al-Qâdirî, which devote important pages to Ibn Abî Mahallî.

3 This enterprise is comparable in many aspects to that of Ibn Tûmart; nevertheless, in the Arab sources cited above, Ibn Abî Mahallî was never the object of the attention given to Ibn Tûmart in historiography, because of his failure to obtain continuity, to meet his own ' Abd al-Mu'min. On the other hand, Ibn Abî Mahallî himself grants, in his writings, a privileged place to the figure of Ibn Tûmart and shows himself very interested and concerned by the founder of the Mu'minid dynasty. However, there was no dynastic historian who devoted himself to the biography of the founder and to magnifying his person, as was the case for Ibn Tûmart. As for the modern bibliographies on both, they are not comparable.[3] will perhaps represent an advantage for us because the historiography, sometimes controversial and very often deeply ideologized, of which the Mahdi of the Almohads was the object, is a considerable weight which it is difficult to free oneself at this time of interpret with a fresh eye the sources that concern him [4] .

4 French colonial historiography, however, devoted some attention to this character by describing him as a "marabout", a religious character, or rather "religionist", taking the lead in the xenophobic reaction of a few anarchic and primitive tribes, a charlatan who exploited xenophobia and fanatic superstitions for the benefit of its own chimeras: comparing it, finally, to the rebellions against the French occupation, very often of a messianic character, which had occurred in Algeria during the 19th centurycentury, and opposing the latter to ideas of modernity and civilization. In the history textbooks of Morocco currently in use, Ibn Abî Mahallî appears as one more episode among the many disorders that occurred after the death of Ahmad al-Mansûr and during the civil war between his heirs, disorders for which different groups sought. to take advantage to fill the power vacuum.

5 In this work, I will use three types of sources. First, the works of Abî Mahallî himself, who produced a very abundant number of writings. Second, contemporary or later Arabic sources; these sources still support the established dynastic power and insist on the danger of following the rebellions, and in particular the messianic adventure. Third, we have a considerable amount of archival material from the European observers of the time who went to the court in Marrakesh in order to establish relations with the new ruler and obtain trade concessions. The themes treated in these sources are very numerous, from the popular expectations and beliefs of the followers of the movement, to the person and the doctrinal elaboration of own Ibn Abî Mahallî. These archives will make it possible to perceive which aspects of an individual thought manage to acquire in what way, a public

legitimacy, by transforming themselves, and during which processes. The use of different types of sources, with divergent views, gives the opportunity to identify with precision the different levels of consideration enjoyed by a figure in public life. This use of the corpus makes it possible to observe the articulation between, on the one hand a personal trajectory and an ideological preaching, and, on the other hand, expectations and a popular interpretation. He thus gives the opportunity to understand the attitude of his contemporaries, ulemas and Sufis,

6 The Mahdi, as we have already said, is one of the "typical characters", trying to unify secular power and religious authority, particularly representative and recurrent in Islamic societies. The phenomenon of Mahdism is not only related to the question of the imamate, and to that of the legitimate leadership of the community, but also with the Islamic ideas of redemption and salvation.

7 In Sunni Islam the term *al-mahdî,* literally, "the good or righteously guided", is an eschatological figure who "will rise" to achieve a great social transformation in order to restore the sublime purity of the first times, by putting all humanity under divine guidance. He must be a member of the *ahl al-bayt,*of the Prophet's family, and bear the same name as him, Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allâh. The Islamic messiah embodies the aspirations of his followers for the restoration of the Faith as it was experienced in the early days, bringing divine and uncorrupted guidance to all mankind, establishing a just and free social order. oppression, order which will precede the End of Times. He is a restorer and revitalizer of religion and also the one through whom the redemption of the community of believers will be achieved. The mahdi therefore constitutes a bridge between past and future as well as between the secular or the political and the religious.

8 By secular power, I mean the power - based on military power but not dependent only on it - to govern, that is to say, to organize society in hierarchies, to levy taxes, to defend oneself and to defend the governed. Secular power is realized from the principles of efficiency and claims to be maintained and perpetuated. By religious authority I mean the authority guiding and ordering the lives of people in accordance with what the holders of this authority consider to be divine authority, always above secular power. This authority is based on the ability of those who hold it to convince their fellows that they have special access to divine authority and that they act as its agents. Their strength often finds its basis in that they are perceived as capable of attracting benefits or curses, that is to say blessings or curses, on all or part of society. This authority may flow, for example, from their knowledge of sacred and legal texts as well as from their ability to interpret them, as is the case with the ulama; as well as their ability to gain access to the divine through miraculous acts*(karamât)* as is the case with *awliyâ* 'or "friends of God"; or by direct mandate and divine guidance linked to their lineage, the *ahl al-bayt,*in the case of the mahdi. In Islamic worlds there has been and there is a constant tension between the realities of secular power and the powers claimed by religious authorities. The tensions caused in Islamic societies by social and economic dysfunctions or conflicts are often expressed by the claim of a religious authority to be above secular political power or, as in the case of the mahdi, to unify the two. . Conflict and tension exist not only between those who hold secular or political power and religious authorities, but also and with almost equal intensity between the various types of religious elites.

9 In my opinion, at the time in question, there is a rivalry between groups that aspire to define and control the different ideologized (and therefore political functionality) interpretations of Tradition. These are elites with political ambitions who develop and disseminate their representations of the past. This rivalry or competition for power between various groups of aspirants or holders of religious authority also exists between different saints and their followers. A mahdi implies a charismatic authority ready to break the norms in force but this in the name of Tradition, since he aspires to revive a lost past: a charismatic movement can cause the radicalization of Tradition and subsequently its transformation. Thereby,

> "In societies based on oral tradition, the memory of the community unwittingly tends to hide and integrate changes. The relative plasticity of material life corresponds to an accentuated immobility of the image of the past. It has always been that way; the world is what it is. It is only during periods of profound social transformation that the image, generally mythical, of a different and better past emerges; a model of perfection, in front of which the present appears as a decadence, a degeneration ... The struggle to transform the social order becomes in such a case a conscious attempt to return to the mythical past "(Ginzburg, 1993: 126).

10 This mythical past frequently acquires utopian and millenarian characteristics. Salvation, in the form of a return to this infinitely pure past, is brought about by a redeemer who acts as a mediator between the human and the divine. The intense, total commitment that millennialism demands is embodied in this charismatic leader, a man considered extraordinary and endowed with supernatural powers.

11 As for redemption, the Islamic doctrine of salvation was conceived as the formation of an ideal politico-religious community living within the social and legal framework of Islam. It is clear that such an ideal depends to a large extent on the leader who can guarantee its realization. The doctrine of salvation becomes entangled with that of divine direction through the mediating action originally assigned to the prophet Muhammad. The French orientalist Paul Casanova affirms (1911) that the mahdi is an avatar of the prophet Muhammad, that he is, in reality, Muhammad of return ... The development of the cult of the Prophet which, in the Maghreb, occurred mainly like Sufism, helped to nurture eschatological expectations.

12 In previous works, I tried to show how the Mahdi acquires the profile of a Puritan reformer in the Maghreb and how its recurring appearance is related to Sufism (Garcia-Arenal, 1990; 1992). Millenarianism and the eschatological discourse seem inherent in Sufism mahgrébin since the XII th century and beyond. During these centuries, Sufism was also a vehicle for the Islamization of rural areas. The practice of precepts such as *al-amr bi-l-ma'rûf wa-l nahî 'an al-munkar* (command good and forbid evil) is closely associated with the asceticism and puritanism of the Sufis. Especially the practice *of jihâd that* the *zâhid must*first to practice on himself and apply to his human passions, then to his immediate environment in order to adjust this environment to the religious norm in which he has decided to live. Agent of Grace, the saint is necessarily the instrument of Rigor and this implies the modeling of the sphere of the terrestrial according to the orders of divine Wisdom. This is why he often becomes a censor and reformer of mores, undertakes the renewal and revitalization of religion in its social aspects and condemns the corruption and ineffectiveness of political authorities. There cannot be a complete doctrine of holiness that does not take into account the definition of political legitimacy.

13 Enlightened violence, militancy and incorruptible moral radicalism are frequent factors in the practice of the *hisba*. The *hisba* provides a theoretical basis for two aspects of Sufism which could appear contradictory, as are the violent rejection of all conformism at the same time as an extreme fidelity to a revived Tradition.

14 In this context, one cannot avoid mentioning Gellner. This said there is already some time (Gellner, 1981, and already in his thesis, sixties) that in the history of Morocco to the XX thcentury inclusive, there have periodically emerged Puritan reformist movements that advocate a return to pure and unblemished Islam from the First Times, the Islam of the Koran and the Sunnah. These reformist movements find their origin in the famous and discussed dichotomy that Gellner establishes between "orthodox", puritan, scripturalist and city-dweller Islam and "popular" Islam, which borders on heterodoxy, "anthropolathic" and ritualist, needing mediation under different forms of saints and religious figures. Sufism is a component of popular religion and, according to Gellner, only of it. This author maintains that the mountain and desert tribes of Morocco periodically enter into rebellion against the ruling dynasty on behalf of the puritanical and orthodox Islam which normally is associated with cities. Ideals of urban orthodoxy are present in rural tribes although they are subordinate to the norms of popular belief. Once triumphant, these movements would relax with regard to this norm (in that pendulum

movement that Gellner borrows from Hume), paving the way after a while for a new reformist movement. We will take into account its interpretive paradigm when analyzing the story of Ibn Abî Mahallî. But if I started by quoting Ginzburg it is because it seems to me less reductive, more operational in its analysis and because, in a certain way, it implies something that I am interested in emphasizing here, namely that there are two ways of understanding Tradition: one that we could qualify as pure conservatism, that is to say, the more or less spontaneous way of doing things as we imagine that they have always been done, or of thinking that what we believe in always has been. This way of understanding Tradition is related to what we know about "collective memory", which always implies a considerable degree of distortion of the past. Maurice Halbwachs has shown that this collective memory is a social reality supported and transmitted by the efforts of the group. The other way to understand Tradition consists of a conscious, thoughtful and ideologized approach at a critical moment, to impose a Tradition that has been invented or voluntarily recreated. This "invented" Tradition has different versions depending on the elites who develop and disseminate them. The question that interests me here is, if we accept that these are social fictions, to know why there are fictions that are so successful and others that are not.

15 A combination of circumstances intervened at the time of the rebellion of Ibn Abî Mahallî, which allows us to consider it as a time of acute crisis. In the early years of the 17th centurycentury, Morocco had suffered from a series of droughts and famines culminating in a terrible epidemic of plague which did not escape even the sultan, Ahmad al-Mansûr. His death in 1603 unleashed a lasting civil war, between his heirs who were fighting for the throne. The civil war and the power vacuum caused a profound disintegration of society, and caused alliances between groups which, in a way, suffered from dislocation. From 1609 begin to arrive in Morocco the last representatives of an already mythical Andalus, the Moriscos, who disembark in the most painful circumstances. In 1610 one of the candidates for the throne, one of Ahmad al-Mansûr's sons called Mawlây al-Shaykh, ceded Larache to Spain in exchange for military aid to access the throne. Tangier, Ceuta, Oran, remain in the hands of the Spaniards. Even so, in the last years of the previous century (in 1592), Ahmad al-Mansûr had conquered a Muslim country, Sudan, and had used deliberately messianic propaganda to justify this action (Garcia-Arenal, 1996). We are also on the threshold of the millennium. The year 1592 coincides with the year 1000 of the Hegira. A very often quoted passage from the historian al-Ifrânî puts all these circumstances in relation to Ibn Abî Mahallî: The year 1592 coincides with the year 1000 of the Hegira. A very often quoted passage from the historian al-Ifrânî puts all these circumstances in relation to Ibn Abî Mahallî: The year 1592 coincides with the year 1000 of the Hegira. A very often quoted passage from the historian al-Ifrânî puts all these circumstances in relation to Ibn Abî Mahallî:

> "The entry of the troops of Sultan Aboulabbas into Sudan, the capture of Sultan Sokia in his palace in Jaghou and the conquest of Timbuktu and its dependencies were among the precursors of the imam Fati-mite coming soon, the mahdi. In the same way, the plague which reigned during these years, the seditions and the high cost of the food which besides still persists in the various regions, had also been indices of the arrival of the Mahdi; we must add to this list and what we are told, the capture of Oran which was to be made by the Mahdi himself, or by his orders. »(Ifrânî, *Nuzha:* 307)

16 These are a few brief notes on the historical context of Ibn Abî Mahallî's movement before moving on to the story of his life. I will divide this account into three parts, depending on the type of sources on which I am relying, that is to say, his work itself, the Arabic sources, and the contemporary European sources. I will pass more quickly on the work of Ibn Abî Mahallî which is the subject of the article by Houari Touati in this same volume; I will only use it here to supplement my arguments.

17 I thus begin with the writings of Ibn Abî Mahallî himself. According to I *slit* [5] *,* Ahmad ibn Abd Allâh ibn Muhammad ibn al-Qâdî, known under the name of Abû Mahallî or Ibn

Abî Mahallî, was born in Sijilmasa around 967/1560. His family kept a *zâwiya* in this locality, known as Zâwiyat al-Qâdî because the Awlâd Mahallî had distinguished themselves by exercising the functions of cadi for several generations. Our character arrogates by his father an Abbasid lineage by al-'Abbâs ibn 'Abd al-Mutallib, and by his mother an Idrissid lineage. This is of capital importance for his political claims. [6]

18 Ibn Abî Mahallî studied with his father, also a cadi, who is described in *Islït* as an extremely severe and authoritarian character; that he educated his son according to the strictest rules and by instilling in him the aversion that he himself felt for Sufism. Around 980/1572 his father sent him to study in Fez. He remained there five or six years; rustic and rough-hewn villager, he often suffered from the mockery of his comrades. Fez dazzles him. He writes in *lslït:*

> “I saw in this mosque (al-Qarâwiyîn) sciences and men of science, whom I cannot describe because I have never had the opportunity to see such things. I felt sad, sorry, when I saw the level that Fasis children my age have reached. They studied, understood, and acquired sciences that the children of Sijilmassa older than me could not and will never be able to reach, this saddened me and made me very *sad* ” *(Islït:* 59).

19 He was still in Fez when, in 1578, the troops of Portuguese King Don Sebastian landed in Morocco. Panicked, like many others, and convinced of the imminence of the Christian conquest, Ibn Abî Mahallî fled to take refuge in a remote place. However, as we know, the battle of Al-cazarquivir or the Three Kings ended with a glorious Moroccan victory with the active participation of countless ulemas and *awliyâ '*. We can suppose, from what he says in *Islït,* and especially by the excessive way in which he justifies his flight, that on his return things must not have been easy in Fez for those who had not. took part in this business.

20 Ibn Abî Mahallî abandoned the city and took refuge in the countryside in the company of *Shaykh* Muhammad ibn Mubârak al-Tastawî al-Za'rî, a quasi-illiterate saint renowned for his strange powers, whom he approached much more by curiosity than out of interest because, as he says:

> “I was passionate about study and never dreamed of embracing the doctrines of the Sufis. The Sufis of the time enjoyed a sad reputation and, for my part, I felt the most extreme distrust of them. "

21 In contact with him, he undergoes a real conversion to Sufism which he relates in I *slît* and which leads him to a break with his father:

> “When I decided to isolate myself to devote myself entirely to the science of the Truth, my father, God forgive him, got angry and refused to believe the news.

22 He wrote me a severe letter calling me crazy and he wondered how I dared to prefer ignorance to science, to choose life in the country and to leave the city ” *{Mît:* 6).

23 This conversion to Sufism manifests itself in painful, violent crises:

> “I have lived through moments of madness and death. I couldn't sleep anymore. Sometimes I went out barefoot in the streets ... I continued to live these moments of illness until the day when God healed me of these ailments and saved me from a physical and mental loss ... " *{Mît:* 54).
>
> “Finally, the blindfold that covered my eyes tore, and when I saw what I saw, I converted. I therefore set myself to follow my shaykh because, without his help or that of God, I would certainly have perished, just as if I had not been directed by him, I would certainly have gone astray. And how could it have been otherwise, since it is thanks to this shaykh that God freed me from the ocean of passions where I was going to swallow myself ... ” *{hlît:* 54).

24 One day he wanders in the street repeating " *anâ sultan, anâ sultan* " (I am sultan, I am sultan) anecdote that his adversaries repeat as proof of his ambition and that, in *al-*

SalsabîL, another of his works, Ibn Abî Mahailî himself tells the story by giving it a figurative and spiritual meaning, as a reflection of a state of uncontrollable euphoria. After two years spent with the *Shaykh,* Ibn Abî Mahailî left to make the pilgrimage, an equally long and painful adventure, during which he wandered for months in the desert of Barqa in Cyrenaica and arrived ill, half-dead, in Cairo.

25 He returned to Morocco and settled in Figuig, where he devoted himself to the study of the *Kitâb al-shifâ* 'of cadi' Iyâd. He also became the disciple of a very important Shadhilite saint of the region, Abd al-Qâdir b. Abî Samha, known as Sîdî Shaykh, who goes so far as to give him his daughter in marriage. However, Ibn Abî Mahailî is very quickly disappointed by this character whom he considers as fraudulent and hypocrite in addition to *bidâ'î* (innovator) and starts a violent controversy with him. Between 1606 and 1610, these are the years of great literary activity of Ibn Abî Mahailî. Much of this activity is devoted to denouncing Sîdî Shaykh and his ilk. He has a particular interest in the denunciation of the *bid'â*(blameworthy innovation) and those he sees as supporters of magic and necromancy, heretical rites, fraud and corruption. Above all, of imposture; much of his work seems to be devoted to pondering this idea. He also undertakes the denunciation of the corruption of the world and the need to return to a purified religion. From imposture it passes to legitimacy. It is no longer just a question of separating the canonical saint from the charlatan, but of taking sides against the central power: the obedience due to the imam can only be conditional. A moral evolution leads the devotee to assume the temporal magisterium; only introspection can disentangle divine impulse from demonic temptation. All authority must be *earned* and the *shurafâ '(the*descendants of the Prophet, holders of the dynasty) cannot be *proud* of it by the mere fact of being a *Sharîf*. He proclaims the right to rebellion against the monarch who does not fulfill his duties.

> “If the passions take power over the true Power which is that of God, the Merciful one gets angry and the devil rejoices. That despite this the scholar follow the devil, then religion fades the landmarks and God orders the destruction of the world. »(Cited in Berque, 1982: 70). “The just is the shadow of God on the path” (cited in Berque, 1982: 71).

26 The righteous, that is to say, the one who revolts against corrupt power. At the end of his work *Salsabîl,* he urges believers to order good and forbid evil. In the *Mihrâs:*

> "As for the one who openly commits sins (Sultan Zaydân) if a reformer (that is to say, himself) rebels against him for love of religion, it is important for every Muslim to follow him to make faith in God triumph. Anyone who does not do this is a disobedient ... ” [7] .

27 Ibn Abî Mahallî shows himself tormented by the spiritual duty that the *qutbaniyya entails,* that is to say, the charge corresponds to the Sufi category of *qutb* (pole) which is responsible for ensuring the salvation of his community in the name of God . He devotes several pages to Ibn Tûmart. His rhetoric, especially against Sîdî Shaykh, is extraordinarily violent.

28 Ibn Abî Mahallî paints an apocalyptic picture, representing Christians as a two-headed hydra, one head in Malta, the other in Oran. He evokes the loss of al-Andalus, the situation of Ceuta, Tangier and Oran, but above all, he is dismayed by the cession of Larache to the Spaniards. Ibn Abî Mahallî reproaches his contemporaries for having abandoned the sacred duty of jihâd and for having accepted humiliation. The mahdi will come to take the lead ji *hâd*.

29 The country is divided by the struggles between candidates for the throne:

> "When the countries collided, when in all the regions of the Maghreb the prices rose, that the conflicts and the epidemic during consecutive years did not let go any more the country, that the unfortunate fell into perdition, that the demon, not satisfied more of those he had in the claws sought to capture the others, that the mighty devoured the weak, that heads turned upside down, that absurdity rose to the top, while the nobility was swallowed up, that the law withered away and that traces

> disappeared, that the souq of iniquity was held in every place "[...]" Men behave like women and women behave like men ... alcohol is sold publicly in the streets, betrayal triumphs and safety disappears forever ” *(Islît:*58).

30 The natural order of things has been reversed.

31 Ibn Abî Mahallî insists at length on the fact that the evils of the time are the same as those we saw in the brief passage of al-Ifrânî: drought, high food prices, hunger *{Isl'ît:* 33). He considers the conquest of Sudan by Ahmad al-Mansûr and the way in which Ahmad Bâbâ was treated as one of the precursors of the coming of the Mahdi. On the other hand, he affirms that the Mahdi will appear in the Maghreb *(Islît:* 91) and categorically says: "I have heard that the Mahdi will come from Sijilmassa and will have studied at the Qarâwiyîn". The mahdi will be the last of the saints as the Prophet was the seal of the prophets *(khatim al-awliyâ ',* if one uses the terminology of Ibn al-Arabî).

32 Ibn Abî Mahallî does not only speak of the precursor signs of the coming of the Mahdi which occurred in his time, but also of the conditions and characteristics that this character must bring together: lineage, physical signs etc. which, of course, can all be on his person. The strategy is the same as that of Ibn Tûmart described by Abd al-Wahîd al-Marrâkushî. According to him, Ibn Tûmart began by ordering good and forbidding evil. After that he started to mention the mahdi and make his supporters want him to come. Then he talked about the traditions relating to the mahdi and describing the characteristics and signs, until his followers said, “These signs are only found in you, you are the mahdi! ". (al-Marrâkushî: 146).

33 The Arab sources that I mentioned before speak of Ibn Abî Mahallî always in connection with the theme of the danger involved in the censorship of morals. They all present him as a renowned and respectable jurisconsult as such. The *shaykh, the faqîh* Abû-1-Abbâs Ahmad al-Tuwâtî (who wrote a work on Ibn Abî Mahallî which al-Ifrânî quotes) says:

> “First of all, the jurisconsult Abû Mahallî was a simple lawyer; after having gone for some time in the path of Sufism, he received divine inspiration and soon manifested the signs of his providential mission. The crowds came to see him on pilgrimage, some coming in isolation, others in groups. His fame soon spread throughout the country and his followers became very numerous. Myself, learning all this, I went to him and stayed there for some time, until I saw that he gave himself to be the established Mahdi, announced by authentic traditions. At that moment, I refused to follow him in this way and abandoned him to his vanities. »(Al-Ifrânî, *Nuzha:* 331).

34 The most developed text in this regard, which other sources (al-Qâdirî, al-Ifrânî) reproduce or quote, is that of al-Yûsî, included in his *Muhâdarât.*For al-Yûsî, the action, legitimate in itself, to order good and forbid evil, can be taken too far. And this because, whoever sets out on this path believes himself to be superior, and often is inspired by an earthly ambition and a demonic inclination. Al-Yûsî explains very clearly how a false assertion, given by the reformer of morals, and according to which he is capable of strictly applying the law, can induce in the people the idea that it is indeed the hoped-for Mahdi. The first of these types of people, continues al-Yûsî, was Mahdî Ibn Tûmart to whom he devotes a long chapter which ends with the account of a personal experience with some Sufis of Jabal Banî Zirwâl with whom he found to find accommodation;with calculations and predictions concerning the coming of the mahdi, and where we speak of the *ta 'ifa tûmartiyya.* Al-Yûsî felt so alarmed by the conviction of being among supporters of Ibn Tûmart, that he hastened to abandon the place without touching the food they had prepared for him. But the real objective of his diatribe against the dangers of moral reform is Ibn Abî Mahallî. He tells various anecdotes in which he portrays the latter as an excessive practitioner of the *hisba*and cites the example of Ibn Abî Bakr al-Dilâ'î who opposed a refusal when Ibn Abî Mahallî demanded that he go in the street to censor mores: al-Dilâ'î replied by purifying himself and praying himself, showing as he considered this duty to begin and end with oneself:

> “As far as I'm concerned, I achieved my goal, kept my religion, and returned to integrity and purity. And whoever comes with an evil deed, God will take it into account. As for you, look at what you've been guilty of. » *{Muhâdarât:* 106).

35 But Ibn Abî Mahallî continued in the same way, captivated the hearts of the people by saying that he was the expected mahdi and affirming that he would take the head of the *jihad*. [8] The authors cited relate the adventures of Ibn Abî Mahallî and recall all his victories, the predictions relating to the corruption of the times and the signs of the coming of the Mahdi, the beliefs of his followers. In particular they believed that the bullets could not hit them, but that they crashed on them as if they were wax. This belief would endow Ibn Abî Mahallî's troops with extraordinary courage.

36 Al-Ifrânî treats Ibn Abî Mahallî with respect and includes in his *Nuzha* long paragraphs from *Islît*. He presents him as an eminent jurisconsult, of a great elevation of thought and a very elaborate rhetoric, and mentions with admiration his many works. But, he adds,

> “He believed himself capable of accomplishing the mission of reforming morals and it was there, without his suspecting it, that caused his downfall. »(Al-Ifrânî, *Nuzha:* 332).

37 Al-Ifrânî also reproduces verbatim the dualistic discourse of Ibn Abî Mahallî, characteristic of any messianic movement, affirming that he who obeyed him would save himself and the one who followed him would not be among the lost. He also told them:

> "You are superior to the disciples of the Prophet, because it is in a time of error that you stand up in defense of the truth while they lived in the very time of the Truth" (Al-Ifrânî, *Nuzha:* 334) .

38 And he quotes the jurisconsult Yahyâ ibn Abd Allâh al-Hâhî who, alluding to all this, wrote a few verses against Ibn Abî Mahallî "O nation of the Chosen One, of the Guide, do you lack models among the ulemas? times gone by? ". It seems to imply by these verses that Ibn Abî Mahallî claimed to embody Tradition better than the ulemas? It is this Yahya ibn Abd Allâh, who had been a fellow disciple and friend of Ibn Abî Mahallî in Fez who, after leading a campaign against his former companion, will end up fighting against him and confuse him, taking the party of Mawlây Zaydân. We will come back to that.

39 Let us now move on to the texts kept in European archives which contain not only the personal opinion of informants and traders who lived in the entourage of Ibn Mahallî, but also the legends and beliefs concerning him and circulating among the people. Two accounts are clearly hostile to Ibn Abî Mahallî because they take sides in favor of Mawlây Zaydân. One, that of the Jew Moises Pallache (1614), who was a translator for the Sultan and respectively nephew and son of the latter's two agents in the Netherlands (Garcia-Arenal and Wiegers, 1999). The other, that of Jorge de Henin, a Spanish emissary at the court of Mawlây Zaydân, who lived for many years at the Court, and whose handwritten account is kept in the National Library of Madrid (Henin, 1614) pays great attention to Ibn Abî Mahallî. Henin first describes how he began to tell his dreams to his followers. According to Henin, Ibn Abî Mahallî pretended to speak while sleeping:

> “His entourage asked him who he was talking to. He replied that he was speaking with Muhammad, and "he ordered me to raise his troops and other things of great importance". He was again begged to explain the revelation. He then told them that Muhammad had chosen him as sovereign defender of the Moors and as destroyer of evil kings who tyrannized the Mohammedan people, and that he was going to conquer the whole world and reduce all the laws to one. He would enter Rome where, he said, there were as many doors as there were days in the year, made entirely of gold and silver, and also gold bells, and he added that the Moors who would follow him in this expedition would receive such abundance of wealth that they would say to each other: "companion,

40 Many Arabs and Barbarians came from the Sahara to follow him because he had acquired great fame and a reputation as a saint. He began to raise the tax saying it was for

war against Christians. On May 20, 1612, he defeated Mawlây Zaydân and entered Marrakech by making this proclamation:

> “General forgiveness to all by mandate of Muley Mahamete ben Abdala may God elevate him, King of the whole Universe and great Redeemer, sent by God to chastise wicked kings and reward the good. (Henin, 1614: 224).

41 The account of Moises Pallache is more clearly contemptuous, he treats Ibn Abî Mahallî of "impostor and magician", terms which are precisely the qualifiers that Ibn Abî Mahallî used against his rival, Sîdî Shaykh, and which are in fact the arguments typical, intended to disqualify a Sufi *shaykh* who is acquiring too many followers. In Pallache's own words:

> “In the year 1612 he went to the land the Arabs call Sahara. It is an uninhabited place on the far reaches of the territory of the emperor Moulay Zaydân, in the south-east of Morocco. It is there that the aforementioned impostor built a hermitage, that he gave himself the air of a saint, and that he retired far from the world. He lodged there, without asking them any remuneration, all the travelers who came to pass nearby, so that in the end, the Moors from distant lands came to bring him their gifts and presents, thinking thereby to gain the sky ” [9] .

42 Pallache also relates how, during one of his pilgrimages to Mecca, Ibn Abî Mahallî met an Ethiopian who practiced magic and whom he had helped to make a pact with the devil. It relates how the latter began to gather people by promising salvation for those who would kill the followers of the king or his governors. He gathered around him a multitude of people with whom he seized Marrakech where he entered, riding a goat. By mentioning this animal, we try again to designate it as belonging to a category of sorcerer which does not belong to the Islamic world but which would be considered as such by the European readers of Pallache. Throughout the history of Western Mahdism, the apocalyptic figures who go on a divine mission often do so on donkeys. The texts analyzed by Bashear (1991: 50, 68) have pre-Islamic antecedents and correspondences in the histories emanating from Christianity and Judaism. Pallache finishes his writing as he began, affirming "that subjects should never revolt and rebel against their sovereign because God always ends up punishing them for it". The purpose of the writing, which was printed in Rotterdam in 1614, was to demonstrate the legitimacy of Mawlây Zaydân and to justify the continued support given to him by the Estates General, the governing body of the United Provinces of Holland. . And this was necessary, because a few years before (in August 1612), an important Dutch trader, very influential in Holland as in Morocco, Paul van Lippeloo, had written a report on Ibn Abî Mahallî, who he had interviewed with, in a very different sense. This report also begins with the origins of Ibn Abî Mahallî's preaching, the predictions and prophecies that concern him, his fame as a saint in the borders of the Sahara, his campaigns. He insists, like the other documents I have mentioned, that he was leading his supporters to believe they would be immune to bullets, and describes them as follows:

> "All men of the Sahara, robust and hardened, rustic people, most of them walking bareheaded, only having around their body a wicked garment called *haik, wrapping* around their neck a large wooden rosary: *besides* hardened against the heat, the cold and all the privations, more than the Moors of this country; enemies of all other nations, without good manners or customs, but praying to God assiduously in their own way; more zealous observers of the law than the other Moors, mortal enemies of Christians ” [10] .

43 Ibn Abî Mahallî entered Marrakech and proclaimed himself king:

> "This king is called Moulay Ahmed ben Abdallah el Fatimi and gives himself the titles of King of the Two Seas and of the Deserts beyond Guinea, aroused by the order of God to give peace to the world, Believer in the Law of God, Fighting against the infidels ”(SIHM, Netherlands: II, 120).

44 The *khutba* in his name began to be recited throughout the country. He sacked the entire region of Dukala, where rich Arab tribes lived, who for eleven years had refused to pay tribute to the Makhzen. He occupied the whole region as far as Fez ... And van Lippeloo writes:

> "Everyone fears him, which is astonishing, because he uses no particular rigor in his sentences ... Wine and other vices to which the Moors used to indulge, contrary to their laws, are present everywhere abhorred "(SIHM, Netherlands: II, 121).

45 In July 1612 Van Lippeloo went in company with other Christian merchants to an interview with the new king. He received them immediately, in his own tent, seated in the middle on a mat, with a leather cushion on which he was leaning. He wore a white shirt and kaftan and had a red cap surrounded by a blue turban, sandals on his feet and bare legs. He wore around his neck a leather case of the type used to enclose a text of the Koran and in a strap, a *kumia*. He received them in an affable and simple manner, and made them sit around him. He said to them:

> "Welcome to my country, behave like honest people; you will find in me good justice and police, for God has sent me to assist the persecuted, to banish evil from the earth, to restore its laws and to rectify all that Zidan and his followers have so shamefully let down. It is from him that all the evil in the world comes, and that is why, by the will of God, he should neither have any part nor pretend to anything in this kingdom: therefore he will be continued until the last end. I forbid you all to traffic in places that could still be in his possession, under penalty of being regarded as my enemies ... And if he goes to sea, you will oblige me by pursuing him with your ships. . And, if you can bring it to me here, I will reward you, you will be my friends and you will enjoy all my favors. You will see what God will still operate through me: for what I have done is nothing compared to what I will still do »[11] .

46 The report ends by specifying that al-Fatimî wears various signs on the body: the Moors say that it is written in their books that a man wearing these signs will one day be their designated king. The signs are visible and he shows them to everyone. He will conquer Mazagan and the Christian countries until he enters Rome.

47 In the same vein is an English text of September 1612, which provides information very similar to the one above, for it comes from an English trader who was probably part of the group of Christian traders who visited the new sovereign. He says he spent forty days in his *mahalla*. He refers to the predictions about Massa and how the drum will beat. Abu Mahalli affirms:

> "[That he] is sent by God because of the bad government of the sons of Mul-ley Hammet the sherifs; and to restore the religion of their fallen Prophet; and to fight against the Christians and recover the parts of Christendom that the King of Spain took from them such as Granada, Andalusia etc ... and tell his people that they will see greater wonders happen where they will recognize that he is sent by God ... He will have to reign forty years and then will have to come Christ whom they call Sidie Nicer, and he will bring everything back to him because he must judge the world and then everything must end " [12] .

48 Simple and politely man, humbly dressed, endowed with infinite wisdom and expert in science.

> "He is a great saint and learned in the law, and was sought after among many as the most renowned in the land for his blessings and favors" (SIHM, England: II, 470).

49 The traders seem to have been reassured by Ibn Abî Mahallî who convinces them that his fight against the Christians is limited to Spain, France and Italy, while he will maintain good relations with England and the Countries -Bas, to which he will grant the freedom to trade because he was sent by God to free the oppressed, even if they were Christians. This last sentence seems to be directed against the King of Spain. It is necessary to recall the great interest which Morocco had in establishing good relations with the Protestant

countries on which it depended to buy firearms. On Catholic countries, weighed the papal bull which prohibited Catholics from selling weapons to infidels. Like the Arab sources, the European sources are the

50 The abundant information that we have until almost contemporary times about the legends relating to the mahdi who was to appear in Massa and the predictions about him (Ferhat, 1994), and what this suggests to his supporters (the reconquest of al-Andalus, the abundance of gold and silver, etc.), coincide with those collected by these Western merchants contemporary with Ibn Abî Mahallî. Some of these legends also collect these clichés of accusations crossed between holy characters and their supporters, accusations in which we launch each other at the head of imposture, magic, association with demons. The deception, and how to distinguish it from the true grace granted by God, presents itself as the most nagging problem of the holy figures entering the struggle for power. Because we must remember that, during these years, Ibn Abî Mahallî was not the only religious figure to revolt. In addition to the civil wars between the Sa'adian brothers, from 1609, the sedition of the Sous led by Sîdî Ibrahîm, a grandson of the famous Sîdî Ahmad or Mûsâ[13] , from the *zâwiya* of Tazer-walt. From this date begins to take importance Sîdî Yahyâ [14] , also in the Sub, from the *zâwiya* of Zaggada. To the north, it is the *zâwiya* of Dilâ '...

51 These European informants certainly collect contemporary legends and rumors. Legends which proceed on the other hand, from the same tradition as the Arab sources. I will cite one, which may or may not relate to Ibn Abî Mahallî himself. This is a legend attributed to Muhammad b. 'Îsa, the founder of the ' Isawa *tariqa* (Brunei, 1926: 40). The Sa'adien sultan asked for help from this saint in the years 1610-20, the most important period in the saint's life, against a kharijite, that is to say, a rebel, a rebel. This Kharijite claimed to be marked with the Seal of God and carried out fierce propaganda against the central power in the Touat region. His popularity grew day by day, he was *credited with a* thousand miracles and he had 13,000 *khuddâm,*including 9,000 men and 4,000 women. The worried Sultan asked the saint for help so that he could reduce this rebel to impotence. The saint sent a message to the latter so that he would submit; he threatened him and ended up killing him, stung by a black scorpion. The *shaykh* wrote to the sultan:

> “Know that the Touat rebel is dead. He was not a saint, except that he had for wife a jinnya who revealed to him the secrets of men ”(Brunei, 1926: 40).

52 Thus Muhammad b. 'Isa does not doubt that this rebel knows the secrets; if he rejects it, it is because he accesses these secrets by means of bad artifices and not thanks to the holiness that he himself, obviously, manifests. In this legend we then tell another episode in which this Muhammad b. 'Isa confronts another saint, Sîdî Ahmad al-Milfânî, concerning his ability to make it rain. The most total drought has been raging for seven years. Despite living a great distance from each other, they end up with physical violence and one breaks his opponent's leg which in turn dislocates his shoulder. Since these are legends of the 'Isawa, it goes without saying that it is, of course, Muhammad b. '

53 The legend coincides with the chronicle: According to his chroniclers, the Sa'adien sultan Mawlây Zaydân, asked for help from the *faqîh* Yahyâ b. Abd Allâh al-Hahî, who had been a fellow student and friend of Ibn Abî Mahallî in the madrasa of Fez. Sîdî Yahyâ was on the other hand the most important saint of the Sous, a region which he dominated from his *zâwiya* in Zaddaga to the point that he had temporarily succeeded in surpassing in influence his rivals of Tazerwalt, the *zâwiya*descendants of Sîdî Ahmad or Mûsâ. According to certain sources Sîdî Yahyâ undertook a real campaign, in the form of letters, epigrams and poems, compromising the authority and discrediting his former companion. Curiously, he undertook a campaign and used arguments very similar to those that Ibn Abî Mahallî had used against his old friend and teacher, Sîdî Shaykh.

54 All the Under obeyed him and his capacity to raise troops was considerable, that is why Zaydân wrote to this holy personage in the following terms:

"You have a duty to defend my crown, for I am one of yours. You must therefore act in my favor and fight with me whoever conspires against me "(Al-Ifrânî, *Nuzha:* 339).

55 Thus, the sultan presents himself (or the sources present the sultan) as a follower and subject of the saint, almost as his vassal, and this is why he has the right to be defended by his lord. What is clear is that if we pay attention to the definitions I gave at the beginning, the Sultan abandons to the saint two of his fundamental prerogatives: the defense of his own power and that of his subjects, and the organization and use of military force. Yahyâ ibn Abd Allâh tatda more than a year, it seems, to answer the call of his lord but, finally, he gathered many troops formed from his followers and marched on Marrakesh in Ramadân 1022 / October 1613. As in the legend, he ordered the rebels to lay down their arms and threatened them, without being listened to. The two armies*Nuzha:* 340-341). His troops, verifying that they were not, as they believed, invulnerable to bullets, dispersed in panic. The story of al-Ifrânî ends with two chronograms relating to Ibn Abî Mahallî around 1019 and 1022 respectively: "He rose up goat and died ram", that is to say, that he conquered Marrakech riding a male goat and died slain like a sacrificed lamb. Here we cross-reference the information collected by Moises Pallache.

56 Yahya entered Marrakech and settled in the royal palace, thus showing that he thought he would remain in power and master of the capital. This act triggered threats from Mawlây Zaydân. To signify to his supporters that he did not aspire to secular power, and that he only wanted to defend legitimate power (al-Ifrânî, *Nuzha:* 342), Yahyâ abandoned Marrakech and returned to its mountains. But the opinion exists that he really wanted to seize power and that he saw that some of his supporters did not support him in this project and were ready to support him by continuing the fight against Zaydân. In fact, the Berber tribes had started to disperse and return to their lands.

57 However, the chronicle continues, before handing over power to Mawlây Zaydân and crossing the Atlas again, this time to the south, Sîdî Yahyâ, in a story that has the colors of legend, forced the sultan to promise to reform his tyrannical government , to renounce homosexual practices and the consumption of wine, and to remove from power, Jews, like his treasurer Ibrahîm ibn Waysh, who were getting disproportionately rich. The non-respect by the Sultan of this commitment justified the uprising, a few months later, in September 1614, of Sîdî Yahyâ against Zaydân, carried out and also legitimized under the banner of the reform of manners. Sîdî Yahyâ died of poisoning by the Sultan in 1626.

58 Let us recap: Ibn Abî Mahallî comes from a peripheral zone in relation to the Maghreb power centers, where his family locally enjoys influence and social prestige. It is a family of ulemas who are concerned to send their son to Fez to complete his education in religious sciences. Ibn Abî Mahallî converted to Sufism and reached a certain level of mystical initiation, although he continued to follow studies specific to an ulema (such as al-Bukhârî or the cadi 'Iyâd). In contact with other holy figures, he seems tormented by the problems of *bid'a,* of imposture as well as by the problems which seem to him to involve his own *qutbaniyya.*His own desire for rigor prompts him to take action. On all this he reflects and writes at length. There is no doubt, this is attested by the writings of his rivals, that at a time when supernatural grace is exhibited as a *sine qua non* for the manifestation of power and when the chiefs of *zâwiya are* competing to establish a dynasty, the problem of diagnosing the imposture becomes fundamental.

59 Other Saints gain power through local sponsorship and rarely overstep the boundaries of their region. It is a messianic preaching which awakens the endemic expectations in the south of Morocco and gives it an unforeseen although ephemeral dimension. The mahdi's action transcends for a moment tribalism and segmental politics. Ibn Abî Mahallî is a "founding hero" who does not have time to achieve more (to what would be, in Weberian terms, the "routinization of charisma") because he very quickly begins to be abandoned by his followers who , through the flash of the marvelous, do not see their expectations fulfilled of reaching an Islamic "city of God". One of the English observers, whom I quoted above, bode a short duration for Ibn Abî Mahallî because many of the Arab tribes who had followed him were already beginning to abandon him. This same case, the abandonment

of certain tribes, forces Sîdî Yahyâ, the one who routed him, to cede Marrakech once conquered to Mawlây Zaydân. Membership is almost immediate because there is a millennial tradition, an expectation, but the momentum weakens quickly. Probably more than an 'Abd al-Mu'mîn, Ibn Abî Mahallî lacked a Bashîr al-Wanshârisî, someone to purge, organize and stratify the movement in accordance with the specific needs of a nascent secular power which seeks to perpetuate itself. to cede Marrakech once conquered to Mawlây Zaydân. Membership is almost immediate because there is a millennial tradition, an expectation, but the momentum weakens quickly. Probably more than an 'Abd al-Mu'mîn, Ibn Abî Mahallî lacked a Bashîr al-Wanshârisî, someone to purge, organize and stratify the movement in accordance with the specific needs of a nascent secular power which seeks to perpetuate itself. to cede Marrakech once conquered to Mawlây Zaydân. Membership is almost immediate because there is a millennial tradition, an expectation, but the momentum weakens quickly. Probably more than an 'Abd al-Mu'mîn, Ibn Abî Mahallî lacked a Bashîr al-Wanshârisî, someone to purge, organize and stratify the movement in accordance with the specific needs of a nascent secular power which seeks to perpetuate itself.

60 Does Ibn Abî Mahallî coincide with Gellner's famous diagram of the saints of the Atlas? In a way, yes, in the sense that Ibn Abî Mahallî is a Puritan reformer who comes from the periphery of the system, that is to say, a rural leader who questions the legitimacy of the dynasty; also in the sense that it is probably the contact with the center of this system that instills certain ideals and expectations in it, and that this system to which it only marginally belongs cannot satisfy it. Marginality and radicality are two clear and distinct ingredients of his movement. It is Sufism which gives vehicle and expression to its frustrations, it is it which provides legitimate arguments and in which it finds avenues of expression for its anger and violence.*tarîqa,* to a *zâwiya*. For example, Sîdî Yahya is a famous chief of *zâwiya*. Not only have we seen that he studied in a *madrasa* in Fez: al-Tama-nartî, in his *Fawâ'id* includes in the biographies of his masters that of Sîdî Yahyâ, and specifies how, in his *zâwiya,* he studied under his direction Bukhârî, and the science of *hadîth.* [15] Al-Yûsî, who is an *'alim,* when he meets in the mountains the group of supporters of Ibn Tûmart, story to which I referred *above,*was going to visit the tomb of Abd al-Salâm ibn Mashîsh in the hope of obtaining benefits thanks to the mediation of this saint (al-Yûsî, *Muhâdarât:* 75). We could go on, but it is clear that at this time there was no real separation between *ulamâ'et awliyâ ',* orthodox and urban Islam and heterodox and rural Islam. It is a separation which will be clearly established only from the movement of Salafiyya in the decade of 1920. Sufism is not only rural: it embodies the religious ideal of an elite and manages to fulfill a social function. by spreading and providing an ideology intended for the underprivileged classes. The theological debate on the excesses of the *tarîqa-s,* on the limits of*bid'a,* is also manifested in the social system and influences the restructuring of groups and local authorities. And all these restructuring of groups and competitions from the local level for power take place under the religious sign, whether censorship or reform, and both imply an ideological transformation of this "orthodoxy" which is above all a Tradition which, d 'after Gellner, belongs only to the Ulemas.

61 Returning again to al-Yûsî, whose *Muhâdarât* denounce and condemn the mentioned perils, he devotes several chapters in this same book to the defense of *tawassul,* that is to say, intercession, himself giving testimony of supernatural facts, divination *(mukâshafa),* premonitory dreams, beneficial interventions (al-Yûsî, *Muhâdarât:* 79 ff). Imposture arises from the excess of material appetites to yield to the vanities of the world. It is the political ambition, the audience easily acquired thanks to this speech, which alarmed many of these men of religion, saints and ulemas.

62 “The political conjunctions of this time were made in large part by the encounter between the initiative of privileged individuals and the morphology of groups” (Berque, 1958: 88). Each ascetic, each *talib* holds in his hands the opportunity of a news, of a

necessary city of God by resorting to symbols produced and nourished by the social and historical experience of the human groups within which he carries out his work. preaching.

> “An endemic millenarianism, an ever-latent violence, but also a sincere devotion and a generous rebellion against the vices of this world provide these reformers with an immediate audience likely to develop enormously. From this follows the reserve that the Islam of doctors opposes to them, the guarantees that it demands. "(Berque, 1958: 88)

63 Finally, if we come back to the distinction we made at the beginning of this article between two ways of understanding tradition, which coincide or can be compared with the notions of “collective memory” and “invented tradition”, we can say that this is a tradition invented but rooted in Tradition, that is to say, in "collective memory". The success of the version that Ibn Abî Mahallî proposes of Tradition and of his own role as its guarantor, is due to the ease with which it can make it coincide with the "collective memory" of the tribes in which it takes place. preaching. Contemporary European sources, which collect the beliefs and predictions of supporters of Ibn Abî Mahallî, show the mold where the preaching of the latter is gathered, received, adapted. The distance between the ideas of the writings of Ibn Abî Mahallî and popular beliefs disappears, for a time, in an illusory way, and the difference always maintained between two ways of understanding Tradition is blurring to ensure the rapid and fleeting success of the Mahdi , "Master of the hour", master of the moment.

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Abbreviations
S.IHM: Unpublished *Sources of the History of Morocco* .

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Notes

1 A first version of this article was presented in the seminar “Action, political language and religion”, coordinated by myself, Madrid, February 1997, and financed by the European Science Foundation within the framework of the project “Individual and Society in the Mediterranean Muslim World ”. The article in its present form owes much to the comments of the seminar participants, in particular, M. Fierro, FR Mediano and D. Wasserstein.

2 See a description of his works in Berque, 1982: 275; al-Hajji, 1977: 211.

3 Absence bien sûr relative, puisque Ibn Abî Mahallî a fait aussi l'objet d'un certain nombre d'études, dont j'utilise ici Le Tourneau, 1956; Jacques-Meunier, 1982 : vol. II; et, surtout, Berque, 1982 : 45-80; 'Abd al-Majîd al-Qaddûrî, 1991 ; 1994.

4 Les contributions *supra* de Nagel, Fierro et Brett en font la démonstration.

5 J'utilise le ms. de la Bibliothèque Royale de Rabat, n° 100. De longs passages de *l'Islït* sont reproduits dans les *Muhâdarât* d'al-Yûsî, et aussi dans l'étude qu'al-Qaddûrî a consacré à cet ouvrage et dont je fais un abondant usage.

6 Ce point fait l'objet de la discussion qu'il mérite dans l'article de Houari Touati, *supra*.

7 . *Mihrâs :* 7 ; Apud Hajjî, 1977 : 270.

8 al-Yûsî, *Muhâdarât,* 105-113.

9 SIHM, Pays-Bas, II, 441.

10 SIHM, Pays-Bas, II, 120. 1. 5 août 1612.

11 SIHM, Pays-Bas, II, 123.

12 SIHM, Angleterre, II, 469. « he is sent from God because of the evil government of Mulley Hammet's sonnes the Keriffes; and to stablish their Prophet's religion that was decaied; and to fight against the Christians and recover those parts of Christendom the King of Spaine holds from them as Grenada, Andaluzia, etc. and tels his people that shall yet see greater wonders comme to passe where they shall acknowledge he is sent of God... He must reign forty years and then must come Christ whom they call Sidie Nicer, and he must surrender all to him for he must judge the world and then all must end. »

13 Sur lequel voir al-Tamanartî, *Fawâ'id al-Jamma,* trad, française Justinard, Chartres, 1953 : 65 et 85.

14 al-Tamanartî, *op. cit. :* 66.

15 al-Tamanartî, *op. cit. :* 66.

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About the author

Mercedes García-Arenal
CSIC Madrid.

By this author

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